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EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS.

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INFORMAL EDUCATION PRIMARILY INCLUDES EDUCATION FOR EVERYDAY EFFECTIVE LIVING AND DOES NOT NECESSARILY HAVE TO INCLUDE COURSES FOR CREDIT AT THE HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LEVELS. MILLIONS OF POVERTY STRICKEN PEOPLE CAN BENEFIT FROM THE TYPE OF INFORMAL EDUCATION PROVIDED THROUGH THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY (OEO) IN SUCH PROGRAMS AS--(1) THE JOB CORPS, (2) THE NEIGHBORHOOD YOUTH CORPS, (3) THE VISTA PROJECTS, (4) THE TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS, (5) THE YOUTH EDUCATION SERVICES, INC., AND (6) VARIOUS OTHER HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS. THE POWER STRUCTURES IN SOME OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF THE SOUTH HAVE OPPOSED MANY OF THE OEO PROGRAMS AND BLOCKED THEIR PROGRESS, BUT BY CONTINUING THESE PROGRAMS THE RURAL POVERTY CYCLE CAN BE BROKEN. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D.C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

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EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS

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Informal education from my point of view includes primarily education for every day effective living. It does not necessarily have to include courses for credit at the high school and college levels. Life in our society has become so complex since World War II that really millions of Americans are existing outside our economic and educational arena. These millions can be benefited from informal education, the type which most college's and universities do not find feasible to engage themselves in. In view of this fact, the Federal Government, quite correctly, declared war on poverty and created the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1964. It is within the structure of the Office of Economic Opportunity that Community Action Programs operate. While I intend to discuss briefly some of the informal educational opportunities provided by Community Action Programs, I also intend to draw your attention to the laxity and/or shortsightedness of other federal organizations in providing informal education for rural youths and adults.

The war on poverty is being fought on many fronts. Since this war began, much has been learned about poverty and its cost to the individual as well as to our society. Much more remains to be learned and still much more remains to be done. Rural poverty is lonely and harsh and those families caught up in the web of rural poverty seem to the pessimists to be hopeless. They are not hopeless. The rural poor of America were invisible until the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Rural Community Action Programs have given new hope, new life, and new energies to the poor. The rural poor are gradually learning to determine their own destinies, and even in the light of all the criticisms, which are not valid, they are learning well. This opportunity has been provided only and only through Community Action Programs.

On June 29, 1967, Deputy Director of OEO, Bertrand M. Harding, testified before the Subcommittee on Rural Development of the Agriculture Committee of the House of Representatives. Mr. Harding made the following statement in his testimony:

> "From ground zero two and a half years ago, we have assisted in the development of 618 rural Community Action Agencies, covering 1,551 counties, about two-thirds of all counties designated as rural."

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Mr. Harding admitted that statistics do not tell the whole story but they do give some relative measurements in terms of progress. For fiscal year 1967, he indicated 248.6 million dollars in Community Action Funds will be granted for rural Community Action Programs. This is 32 percent of all Community Action money and even though this is not precisely proportionate to the 43 percent of rural poverty in America, Community Action Programs are well on the way of getting there.

As of June 1967, Job Corps had 13,200 rural youths enrolle and a total of about 26,000 have been in the Job Corps for the past two and one-half years. In addition to the opportunity provided by Job Corps to improve their basic education, their health and their skills, these young men and women are sending home monthly allotments totalling $384,000. To say the least, this is a desperate effort on the part of the Office of Economic Opportunity to break the cylce of poverty, and the figures do indicate that they are succeeding.

The Neighborhood Youth Corps has provided jobs for 250,000 high school-aged rural youths since the program began. They may work in a school cafeteria, or as an aide to a home demonstration agency, or help in any way to develop the physical resources of a community. In January of 1967, 52,000 rural youths were enrolled in Neighborhood Youth Corps receiving wages of 2.8 million dollars per month. This represents about 31.6 percent of the total NYC enrollment. At the request of the Chairman of the Board of the Community Action Program in Macon County, Alabama, Tuskegee Institute is providing basic education for 100 out-of-school youths who are currently enrolled in the Neighborhood Youth Corps. It is a fact that the Department of Labor administers in large part, the Neighborhood Youth Corps but the program in and of itself is getting its stimulus from the Community Action Programs. Community Action Programs do not only make referrals but they endeavor to see that educational opportunities are being provided for the youths enrolled in the program. The Department of Labor and its traditional approach to rural problems could not do it all alone. I have no intention of indicating any federal agencies, but the Department of Labor is employer-oriented. Their programs were never designed to break rural poverty and their field staffs, as represented in the various Employment Service Offices in the many states, are to conservative to think progressively. In many counties in the rural South the Employment Service Office is unheard of, and I do have evidence to indicate that in some counties unemployed members of minority groups have not overcome the frustrations with which they have been confronted with by the Employment Service officials when they go to seek employment. These frustrations are not all together gone. In Montgomery, for example, they don't even use a Negro janitor in the Offices of the Industrial Relations Board. That's the safe way to do it because there is nobody to segregate against. In 1965, I was told by the director of a local Employment Service Office in Florida that he is not going to refer anyone to the Job Corps because if he does, he would have no one to reap the strawberries.

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Poor rural Americans do appreciate the lip-service given to their problems by the Department of Labor, but they are waiting for some action programs. Action programs that will provide them with job training and jobs. Programs that will help keep them in their rural environment and programs that will help them to enrich their families culturally, educationally, and economically. Maybe if the Secretary of Labor and his advisors would set forth on a determined effort to convince large industries that decentralization of industries at this point and time in America's history is good business, the rural poor would begin to see some action designed to help them and industries as well. I made the point very clear earlier on that I do not intend to indict any federal agency; as a matter of fact, the Department of Labor is doing better than other old line agencies in their effort to provide education and job opportunities for rural America. Certainly what they are doing is not enough, but they are trying. The Labor Department in the early 1960's made a desperate and dynamic effort to attack the causes of poverty and to break it through their Project CAUSE (Counselor Aid University Summer Education) Programs, but the conservative elements in the department saw this effort as too progressive, in the circumstances, the Department of Labor developed a bureaucratic rationale to discontinue the program.

In my judgment, it would be good if the Departments of Labor, HEW, Agriculture and Interior give some of their old senior employees a kind of sabbatical leave for two years. This would leave room for some of the more progressive men and women who want to bring about changes in the lives of the poor. A still better suggestion, I think, would be that the Office of Economic Opportunity be charged with the responsibility of executing and coordinating all the programs designed to break the cycle of poverty. In addition, the Office of Economic Opportunity should determine those programs that they want to farm out to old line federal agencies. The question will be asked, WHY? and I wish to answer it here and now. <u>The Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity has surrounded himself with a group of imaginative persons who are willing to work within the framework of our democratic society towards changing the fate of the millions that are poor</u>. This, to begin with, was a great accomplishment, but the constant and unwarranted attacks from political sources may emasculate one of the director's greatest contributions to the war on poverty.

The VISTA Projects administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity provide volunteers, in most cases without cost to the local sponsor, to help with youth vocational exploration and training projects, tutoring, remedial education, counseling, etc. Nearly one-third of the strength of VISTA is in rural areas with more than one thousand volunteers assigned to 135 projects in 34 states. In my judgment, VISTA volunteers are making some very significant contributions to rural America. Above

everything else, they are helping rural people to identify and determine their needs. It is little wonder that rural VISTA volunteers are not among the most popular workers in rural America. It is a misnomer if all Americans believe that all rural America and particularly Southern rural America want to solve their problems. Any attempt to improve the lives of the exploited will be unpopular and that's why VISTA workers in some rural areas are unpopular.

Educational programs sponsored by OEO in rural America are more varied than the colors of the rainbow, however, one ingredient is common to all of them; they reflect the importance of the education-based program as a vital weapon against poverty and the willingness of thousands of volunteers to participate. Let me review a few of them here that I think have unique qualities.

In 1964, Tuskegee Institute received a community education grant from OEO and created what is now known as Tuskegee Institute Community Education Program (TICEP). TICEP was not a very popular program in rural Alabama for very obvious reasons, however, it operated in 12 counties in light of all the criticisms coming from local power structures.

In the twelve counties, basic education was conducted by college tutors in the various community centers. Home tutoring was carried on in four counties. In addition to basic education, the tutees were engaged in art, drama, journalism, and recreation. Most of the equipment used in the recreational programs was handmade under the direction of a physical education professor at Tuskegee Institute. This program brought to rural youths educational and cultural activities that they never would have been exposed to. In addition to the enriched lives now being experienced by these youths, the parents, in my judgment, were the greater beneficiaries. They recognized for the first time that their children had hope, that their children could learn and perform and that their future was by no means in the cotton and peanut fields of Alabama. As a result of TICEP, the adults in the twelve counties have gotten together and have created the Southeast Alabama Self-Help Association. To date, this association has gotten no outside financial help but they are struggling along. If and when they come up for a federal grant, all efforts will be made by some politicians to block it. Unfortunately, not all our political leaders agree that all the people in our democratic society should have an opportunity to determine their own destiny.

Probably one of the most effective youth programs in the South and maybe in America is the Youth Educational Services, Inc. of North Carolina. I had an opportunity to review this project in July of 1967 and I made the following statement:

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> YES's greatest long-term contribution to the area is in terms of building up a cadre of local leaders that are well-trained. All the tutors are potential local leaders and this new leadership will not be the marching type or the riotous type. They will no doubt be the intellectual type of which North Carolina can be proud. The overall long-term effects of YES cannot be objectively predicted at this time, but it is only a very dense person who could overlook the possibility of its great contribution.

This very impressive program conflicted with the philosophy of the ultra-conservatives in North Carolina and they did everything to prevent its effective functioning. Very serious attempts were made by school board officials in one county in North Carolina to scandalize the youths who were working with the culturally-deprived youths and their families. Men of power failed or refused to recognize the value of education in a changing society, and they in turn have prostitutionalized their own consciences in their attempts to prevent progress. In Bertie County, North Carolina, like all the others, the most significant achievement of YES was its success in involving the local communities. YES staff members worked not only as tutors but as teachers of tutors. They were so successful that the program they operated during the summer was carried on by local people trained in the role of tutors. The rural Negro leadership completely and effectively took over when the YES volunteers returned to college.

The 600 non-paid volunteers in the rural areas of North Carolina worked with over 1,000 children who were in need of every type of educational and environmental uplifting. It is this type of progress that the local power structures are fighting; it is this type of progress they fear most, and in my judgment, it is this type of progress that will prevent the recurrence of riots in our big cities. The leadership of America must exert its effort to make rural America a more pleasant and satisfying place in which to live. I agree, the Office of Economic Opportunity is doing its very best in light of all the obstacles that it is confronted with, to achieve this end but under present arrangements, the Office of Economic Opportunity cannot do it all alone; and as I indicated earlier old line federal agencies are not committed.

The seasonal and migrant farmers educational program has the greatest impact on rural America. These programs are designed to get at the causes of rural poverty and to eliminate those causes. In most programs the family is treated as a unit not just the head of the household. It is because of this approach why so many millions of poor Americans are favorably affected. It is because this program is designed to break the strangling hold of large farmers on migratory workers, why in many areas it is vehemently opposed by the local power structures. It is because of the selfish desire of landlords and others to continue exploiting these unfortunate individuals that they are so determined to block the progress of seasonal and migrant farmers educational programs.

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In Alabama, seasonal and migrant farmers programs are changing the lives of thousands of people. Lowndes County, Alabama is the third poorest county in the nation and if the Office of Economic Opportunity did not see fit to fund a seasonal and migrant farmers educational program over the very strong objections of the Governor of the state, the people then would be hopeless. The same is true for Wilcox County, Alabama, which is the 20th poorest county in the nation and the 12th poorest in Alabama. In both of these counties Negroes constitute over 70 percent of the population, therefore, it is little wonder that the powers within the state objected to anything that would go to help them change their poverty status.

Today, in addition to having a seasonal and migrant farmers educational program, Lowndes County also has a health program funded by OEO. People are beginning to identify their own needs and are working towards solving them and all of this is being done through education as envisioned by Community Action Programs. Let me address myself to two more programs in Alabama which have great significance for rural youth and rural life as a whole. The Southwest Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association (SWAFCA) has a tremendous future. This farmers cooperative is currently operating in 10 counties. It was initiated by the marginal dirt farmers who average less than a $1,000 per year income. The cooperative is now funded to the extent of about $4,000,000 with OEO funds. It was funded after very strong objections by the powers in the state. Of course, any program designed to enlighten or help the poor and illiterate in the Deep South is either officially objected to or is given little or no cooperation from state agencies.

SWAFCA's aim is to raise both the educational and economic levels of the poor and by so doing reduce the incidence of migration to the cities. SWAFCA started out with 800 families, now has 1,000 families and have estimated that by the end of its first year there will be 1,500 families as members of the coop. There is no doubt that the beginning of a new day in the Deep South is at hand. Let me quote from a recent publication put out by the Office of Economic Opportunity:

> "The coop, which was endorsed by, and is getting expertise from the United States Department of Agriculture and the Economic Development Agency, is a new concept in OEO's programs of assistance to low-income farm families in the Southern belt. Federal officials view the project as an important experiment to help determine the future of much of the rural South and, by building a mechanism of social and economic development, OEO can help keep the farmers in rural America where they choose to stay."

Note that it is federal officials who view the project as an important experiment. Implied in this statement and quite correctly so, state officials in the South are not all convinced that education is the most effective vehicle through which changes can take place. As a matter of fact, they are not convinced that there need to be any change in the South.

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In seven Alabama Counties, Macon, Marengo, Perry, Bullock, Barbour, Russell, and Elmore, approximately 1,300 rurally based poor farm families are involved in a seasonally employed agricultural workers educational program. This program which is financed entirely by OEO is administered by Tuskegee Institute and has so far made great inroads into the existing problems of poverty. Over half of these families have already changed their physical environment either by repairing their homes, buying new homes, or are building new homes. At the beginning of the program, only 15 percent of all the participants were registered to vote, at the end of the program 86 percent of all the participants were registered to vote.

Many seasonally employed agricultural workers who had no idea that college was intended for their children, now have their children in college. Many seasonally employed agricultural workers themselves have passed the GED test and have at least moved out of the seasonally employed agricultural worker's category into jobs that are permanent; even though the wages some are receiving are miserably low. In the Deep South changes are slow but each step is a move forward and we are not looking back. Emerson once wrote: "The world is no longer clay, but rather iron in the hands of its workers, and men have to hammer out a place for themselves by steady and rugged blows." Ladies and gentlemen, we are trying to do this in the South.

Ladies and gentlemen, just before I address myself to some of the contributions or maybe non-contributions of the Department of Agriculture and Department of Health, Education and Welfare, permit me please to throw one more bouquet towards OEO. Please don't think I am biased, because I am not. The facts must always stand out. The Missouri Bootheel is probably one of the poorest regions in the country. It is a unique kind of poverty--if there is such a thing. Farm lands which are among some of the richest lands in the world are currently being priced at $800 per acre. To the best of my knowledge, there are no real small farmers in the area, in the circumstances, there are only two categories of people in the area: the rich and the poor or more correctly, the exploiter and the exploited. Over and above all the political objections, OEO quite wisely funded a seasonal and migrant farmers educational project in the Bootheel. The results so far have been unbelievable. Beyond the fact that over 70 percent of the participants have changed from the migrant stream into permanent jobs one very significant pattern is emerging and it gives me great hope.

> There is very strong evidence of unity between poor Caucasians and poor Negroes. For the first time they have recognized that their problems are the same and for the first time they are working meaningfully together. This achievement is a long way off in some areas of the country because it is awfully difficult to recruit poor and illiterate Caucasians and until you can recruit them you can't educate them.

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In my judgment, the war on poverty in rural America could be won over a relatively short period if the local power structures were committed and would cooperate with the Office of Economic Opportunity.

The plight of rural America and the growing problems of the big cities must in large part be charged to the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Agriculture is so interwoven in its successes of the past that it has failed miserably in recognizing the present problem. There is no place in rural America for the small farmer anymore. They cannot compete in this age of automation with large farmers, they are in general undereducated and they cannot identify for themselves alternatives and consequences. The end result is that masses of people who are not equipped for urban living have moved into the cities. For all practical purposes and intent, these are the cast-offs from the farms that the Department of Agriculture should be greatly concerned with but the Department was really never concerned. The educational opportunities that are being provided by the Department of Agriculture for rural youth is somewhat superficial. To begin with, in the Deep South, where there are Negro and Caucasian employees in the Cooperative Extension Service, not one Negro agent has been promoted to the chairmanship of a county. In Alabama, for example, the County Chairman who was originally the Home Demonstration agent is white, and all the Negroes are classified as Extension Farm Agents. It is within this setting in the South that our 4-H Programs operate and it is within this setting that the Department of Agriculture expects that youths must grow up to be contributing adults to the American ideal of equality for all.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare is bearing down on most of the inequities in the nation's public school systems. Those of us who are convinced that education is the most effective vehicle to bring about change in our democratic society support in full the efforts of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. It has been a hard and difficult struggle for the Department. They have made some progress but much more is left to be done. Every imaginable evasive technique is still being used by several Southern states to avoid effective integration.

On the one hand, and this is primarily in the rural areas, Negro teachers who are assigned to predominantly Caucasian institutions are not being used as teachers; they may be classified as the assistant to the physical education teacher. In that case his job description is very simple--baggage man for recreational equipment. On the other hand, and this is primarily in the urban areas, the best Negro teachers are being moved out of predominantly Negro schools into predominantly white schools while poor Caucasian teachers are assigned to Negro schools. These are not the kinds of problems that should cause great concern at this time because educated adults should recognize that there are serious problems involved in social change. The most serious problem is in the rural schools that are predominantly white and in order to retain their federal funds they have

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engaged in token integration. The Negro youths in these schools are truly having it difficult. I wonder what would be the reaction of those school officials if the Department of Health, Education and Welfare would insist that a sign be placed in each classroom stating that "instruction is offered in this school without regard for race, color, or national orgin." Something like this may have prevented the seating of Negro children by the wall where they could not see the blackboard and may have prevented situations in which Negro children are not permitted to ask questions of their Caucasian teachers. As bad as this may sound ladies and gentlemen, this situation existed in Wilcox County, Alabama in 1966, and to date, I have no evidence that it has changed significantly.

The danger here is that even though we say we have an integrated system, youths are being educated in a biased setting and there is little doubt that such a setting will eventually produce hostile adults.

In conclusion, I would like to make it abundantly clear, that men and women of goodwill who want to see America progress in all directions are making every effort to help. It is my belief that Community Action Programs are here to stay even in the light of the most unwarranted criticisms.